



The United States Fish and Wildlife Service Museum Properties Program

The Mission of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) is to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. To accomplish this mission USFWS manages 547 National Wildlife Refuges, 69 National Fish Hatcheries, and 203 Waterfowl Production Areas encompassing over 96 million acres of land. But, USFWS stewardship doesn't end there.

In addition to the lands and wildlife resources, USFWS is steward to a rich historical record and manages over 5.5 million objects that are associated with its mission.

What is Museum Property?

The historical objects USFWS manages are known as "museum property." Museum property encompasses objects, artifacts, documents, or collections that have historical, scientific, or enduring educational value. In coordination with other Department of Interior bureaus, USFWS has developed guidelines (FW 126) and goals for ensuring the preservation of these important resources. In order to create a meaningful inventory, 10 categories of museum property have been identified.

Archaeological Collections:

Artifacts excavated from archaeological sites.

Art: Paintings, drawings, sculptures, etc.

Botanical Collections: Plant specimens.

Environmental Samples: Samples of water, soil, or air that provide basic research information.

Ethnographic Materials: Items associated with the traditional culture and lifeways of indigenous or ethnic groups.

Documents: Documents associated with Service history, photographs, and audio-visual records.

Geological Collections: Geological samples and specimens that document the land.

Historical Objects related to the Service: Early equipment or tools, historic firearms, decoys, furniture, scale models, and boundary signs.

Paleontological Collections: Vertebrate and invertebrate fossils found on Service lands.

Zoological Collections: Biological specimens and examples with scientific, historic or educational value.

Table 1. FY 2006 Museum Property Summary	
Discipline	Total Number of Objects
Archeology	2,928,703
Art	695
Ethnography	63
History	40,326
Documents	2,262,264
Botany	17,932
Zoology	185,899
Paleontology	13,686
Geology	0
Environmental Samples	217
Total Number of Objects	5,449,785

Table 1 lists the results of the USFWS-wide inventory of museum property categories as of 2006. Most of these objects and documents are being held in museums and educational institutions. But, some museum property is held at the National Wildlife Refuges for exhibits and interpretation (figure 1).



Figure 1. A mounted River Otter at Marais des Cygnes National Wildlife Refuge

At each of the refuges that hold museum property, staff maintains the objects that illustrate the natural, cultural or historical heritage of their refuge. As an example, the wreck of the Steamship Bertrand, sunk in 1865, was discovered in 1968 on the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge in Iowa.

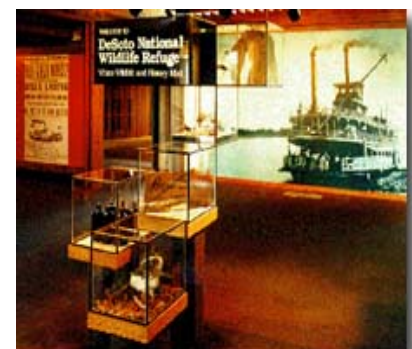


Figure 2. Exhibit of artifacts from the wreck

The following year, over 200,000 artifacts were excavated from the wreck and its cargo (figures 2, 3, and 4). The Bertrand Collection is now exhibited at the refuge providing the visitor with a view into our nation's past and its impacts on wildlife and the environment.



Figure 3. China service recovered from the Steamboat Bertrand.



Figure 4. Men's frock recovered from the Steamboat Bertrand

The USFWS has also established facilities to help maintain museum property on a national basis. The D.C. Booth Historic Fish Hatchery in South Dakota is part of an active effort to preserve the heritage of the Service. Climate-controlled storage is devoted to the preservation of documents and collections related to the history of fish culture.

To document USFWS efforts to preserve our natural heritage, the National Conservation Training Center maintains exhibits on the history of the agency, the Department of Interior, and important events and people in conservation. For example, figure 5 shows CCC workers on White River NWR. The CCC was very important to the development of many Refuges.



Figure 5. Historic photograph of CCC workers at White River NWR, 1936-1941

Identifying and Maintaining Museum Property

Of all of the disciplines defined under museum properties, archaeological collections hold the largest number of objects. Beginning in the 1990s, USFWS began conducting research to identify archaeological collections from refuges in the southeastern U.S. This initial effort was followed

by similar efforts in other regions so that, today, the USFWS has established a baseline inventory of archaeological collections.

Building upon the success of these efforts, the USFWS began the task of better identifying its collections in both federal and non-federal repositories. This national survey has yielded valuable information on the condition and extent of USFWS museum property and has allowed the agency to better evaluate the non-federal facilities holding the materials (Table 2). Such information is required so that the USFWS can continue to meet its internal and Departmental performance measures for museum collections.

Table 2. Improved information from the National Survey

Year	Assessed Repositories	# items cataloged
2004	--	1.74 million
2005	46	1.78 million
2006	86	1.86 million

The importance of Museum Property

The ultimate goal of the USFWS Museum Property program is to properly maintain its collections so that they can be used to illustrate both the history of the agency and its invaluable contributions to science. These collections are important resources that can assist the agency in its day-to-day education and interpretation activities.

You may contact Mr. Eugene Marino (eugene_marino@fws.gov), USFWS National Museum Property Coordinator, 703-358-2173 for more information about the USFWS Museum Property program. You may also visit <http://www.fws.gov/historicpreservation> for additional information on the USFWS museum property program.